

Ernst Ferdinand Sauerbruch and His Ambiguous Role in the Period of National Socialism

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Abstract: The role of German physicians under National Socialism is highly controversial. We show that Ferdinand Sauerbruch, one of twentieth century's most outstanding surgeons and chair of surgery at Berlin's Charité from 1927 to 1949, openly supported National Socialism in his public statements and in his position as head of the medical section of the Reich Research Council. He was appointed state councilor and received the Knight's Cross of the War Merit Cross by the National Socialists. But Sauerbruch also supported victims of Nazi persecution, attempted to use his influence to put a stop to the "Euthanasia Program T4," and in private expressed his criticism of National Socialists. The ambiguous stance of Ferdinand Sauerbruch is probably more typical of the role physicians played during National Socialism than the well-known black-and-white cases.

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Ernst Ferdinand Sauerbruch (July 3, 1875–July 2, 1951) was one of twentieth century's most outstanding surgeons (Fig. 1). A vast number of publications are available on his life and surgical achievements.^{1–10} Some of these publications present a subjectively biased, positive portrayal of his role during National Socialism in Germany.^{1,3} In other publications, this period of his life is simply left out, although they allegedly present the work of his entire life⁸ or they claim that Sauerbruch was in great danger because he was part of the anti-Nazi resistance.⁷ The most important study published so far on Sauerbruch's relations with National Socialism⁴ was ignored in later publications.^{7,8} Given this situation, we deliberately looked at Sauerbruch's activities and attitudes during the period of 1933 to 1945 in the present study.

Sauerbruch was born in Barmen, Germany. He started to study natural sciences in Marburg in 1895 and later went to Leipzig, where he completed his medical studies in 1901.

In 1903, when he resumed his work under Johannes von Mikulicz-Radecki (1850–1905) in Breslau, he started to work on his most important surgical invention: the negative-pressure chamber.¹¹ This chamber for the first time enabled operations on the open chest.¹² However, positive-pressure ventilation, which was developed by the physician Ludolf Brauer (1865–1951) at the same time,¹³ became the established procedure in clinical practice.¹⁴ After 1905, Sauerbruch worked in Greifswald and Marburg and later he was appointed to the chair of surgery at the University of Zurich in 1910 and then at Munich in 1918. Other important and internationally renowned inventions were the "artificial hand" for amputated patients and a functional leg prosthesis for patients with tumors of the thigh. Also known are his experiments with surgically produced conjoined animals.³

Public Statements

From 1927 to 1949, Sauerbruch was the chair of surgery and an academic teacher at our medical school, the Charité in Berlin. He was in favor of the National Socialists seizing power in 1933. His sympathies with this political movement went back as far as the time of World War I⁶ and Hitler's putsch in 1923.^{4,5,15–17}

Sauerbruch's support of National Socialists' assumption of power in 1933 becomes apparent in several speeches (see Appendices 1–2) we discovered in the *Deutsches Rundfunkarchiv* (German Broadcasting Archive).^{9,18,19} At the demonstration of the German scientific community on the occasion of the plebiscite in 1933, Sauerbruch appeared together with Eugen Fischer (1874–1967, a prominent racial anthropologist and vice-chancellor of the University of Berlin from 1933–1934), the famous philosopher Martin Heidegger (1889–1976)²⁰ and the theologist Emanuel Hirsch (1888–1972, dean of the University of Göttingen from 1933–1945).¹⁹

In both speeches on the plebiscite of Nov 12, 1933,^{18,19} in which the people was called upon to agree to Germany leaving the League of Nations and to support the National Socialists' policy of rearmament, Sauerbruch emphasized that "a vote won't actually be necessary since only few would doubt that this time the government's intentions are supported by the whole German people with iron resolution."¹⁹ Instead, Sauerbruch was convinced that this vote was merely necessary for the benefit of the foreign countries which he claimed "still do not believe and do not want to believe, that is, do not want to be believe for fear."¹⁹ What he thought the foreign countries feared was not war but "rather something that had seized the German people with an elementary, supernatural

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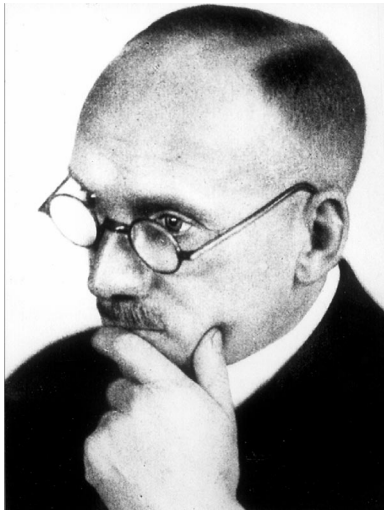


FIGURE 1. Ernst Ferdinand Sauerbruch (1875–1951). Courtesy of Charité, Department of Medical History, picture archives.

power, rousing and stirring up the people and thereby reviving and restoring its lost and buried values.”¹⁹ The seizing of power by the Nazis thus described by Sauerbruch was further characterized by him as “the grand idea of a national uprising” and as “our revolution,”^{18,19} in the political sense. Furthermore, he called upon his audience “to wholeheartedly support the government at this time in view of the degrading period of German history from 1918 to 1933.”¹⁸ These comments retrospectively show Sauerbruch to be an opponent of the first German state with a democratic constitution, the Weimar Republic. Sauerbruch concluded his speech by calling upon his audience “to overwhelmingly declare their support of the will of the *Führer* (Adolf Hitler) and the great task lying ahead of him.”¹⁸

According to Sauerbruch, this was the true purpose of the plebiscite of November 12, 1933, while at the same time offering “Germany an opportunity to show the world that the country had awoken and reclaimed its right to free self-determination and to thus ensure true peace, work and reconstruction.”¹⁸ In contrast to what a contemporary witness remembers,⁴ there is nothing in Sauerbruch’s speeches that shows him to be an advocate of the “internationalism of science.”

Sauerbruch also supported the policy of the National Socialists during the further years of their governance. This can be shown by another speech (see Appendix 3) we analyzed: the speech Sauerbruch gave on the occasion of being awarded the first *Deutscher Nationalpreis für Kunst und Wissenschaft* (German National Prize for Arts and Sciences),²¹ an honor created by Adolf Hitler as a counterpart to the Nobel prize. This was occasioned by the bestowal of the Nobel Peace Prize upon Carl von Ossietzky (1889–1938) in 1936, which he was not allowed to accept. Ossietzky was one of the most renowned German journalists in the Weimar Republic and a pacifist who had been imprisoned in a concentration camp since 1933. In his acceptance speech on the

occasion of being awarded the German National Prize for Arts and Sciences on January 29, 1938,²¹ Sauerbruch expressed his regret about the failure of Hitler’s putsch on November 8 and 9, 1923 as follows:

“Then came November 9, 1923, the day on which the first national trial of strength failed and disappointment and despair buried our hopes. During this great and fateful time, determined creative work and achievement were the themes of our life. This was the time when the foundation was laid for the works that today receive the highest praise from the *Führer*.”

Moreover, Sauerbruch stated that the rise of the National Socialists in 1933 “brought the crucial turn for our fatherland through the *Führer*” and that “National Socialism changed the life of our people on all levels, which also had vitalizing effects on medicine.” These effects he described in more detail: “The medical community had to preserve what had already proved its value, while at the same time being open to great new developments arising from the new spirit. And now we are experiencing with pride and inner joy the recognition of the German physicians by the *Führer* in an elevating, wonderful manner, since the honor conferred on 2 German surgeons (August Bier [1861–1949] was the other award winner besides Sauerbruch) is, in its deeper meaning, an honor and gratification for all German physicians.” He finally expressed his thanks for the trust and the bestowal of the national prize and professed his “commitment to effectively contributing to the great tasks lying ahead of our people.”²¹

Ambiguous Role of Sauerbruch

These speeches portray Sauerbruch as an outspoken supporter of National Socialism, but this is not the whole picture. In his private life, he supported victims of Nazi persecution.^{22–24} Many Germans advocated the antisemitism propagated by the National Socialists while at the same time having some Jewish friends and supporting them economically when they were persecuted.^{25–28} In 1933, Sauerbruch mentioned to his former Jewish colleague Hermann Zondek (1887–1979) that some hospitals were indeed “*verjudet*” (pejorative expression for what was subjectively regarded as an excessively high proportion of Jews) before the Nazis came to power.²⁹ This derogatory remark about Jews in general by Sauerbruch was the decisive reason for Zondek not to return to Germany from his Swiss exile.²⁹ On the other hand, none of the most renowned German surgical journals of that time (*Deutsche Zeitschrift für Chirurgie*, *Archiv für klinische Chirurgie*, *Zentralblatt für Chirurgie*, *Neue deutsche Chirurgie*, *Verhandlungen der deutschen Gesellschaft für Chirurgie*) contains any negative comments on Jews by Sauerbruch. Nor do any issues of these journals contain any statements by him in favor of National Socialism.

Although Sauerbruch later supported victims of Nazi persecution, at least 13 professors were dismissed from the surgical department of the Charité for political reasons from 1933 to 1945.³⁰ The number of residents and attending physicians dismissed during this time was probably even higher. The German National Prize for Arts and Sciences was not the only honor bestowed upon Sauerbruch by the National

Socialists: He was appointed *Staatsrat* (state councilor) in 1934,³¹ promoted to the position of *Generalarzt* (surgeon general) in 1942,³² and was presented with the *Ritterkreuz zum Kriegsverdienstkreuz* (Knight's Cross of the War Merit Cross) by Karl Brandt (1904–1948, Hitler's personal physician and lieutenant general of the *Waffen-SS* [armed SS troops], who was convicted of war crimes in the Nuremberg trials of physicians, and hanged).³³

Sauerbruch did not join the *Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* (NSDAP). By contrast, he was a member of the so-called *Mittwochsgesellschaft* (Wednesday's Society), a club for public figures with a critical attitude toward National Socialism. Some of them were involved in the attempted assassination of Adolf Hitler on July 20, 1944, such as Ulrich von Hassel (1881–1944, ambassador), Ludwig Beck (1880–1944, general), Johannes Popitz (1884–1945, Secretary of Finance), and Carl Friedrich Goerdeler (1884–1945, mayor of Leipzig until 1937).³⁴ However, the racial theorist and National Socialist Eugen Fischer, already mentioned above, also was a member of the Wednesday's Society, which shows that it cannot be regarded as an assembly of general resistance to National Socialism.⁴ Sauerbruch presented 7 medical scientific lectures at Wednesday's Society's sessions between 1934 and 1944. No political comments made by Sauerbruch during any of these sessions of the society have been preserved.

Together with the minister Paul Gerhard Braune (1887–1954) and Friedrich von Bodelschwingh der Jüngere (1877–1946), Sauerbruch attempted to use his influence to put a stop to the "Euthanasia Program T4" of the National Socialist government by personally calling on the Secretary of Justice.⁴ This personal protest was part of a larger movement in Germany.³⁵ Daniel Jonah Goldhagen attributes the growing concern and indignation about the euthanasia program as well as the protest against it to the fact that the people affected were non-Jewish Germans.³⁶ The resistance was mainly sustained by representatives of the church and had the effect of at least officially ending the ongoing killing of the mentally or physically handicapped, euphemistically referred to as euthanasia. Later this program was continued on a highly secret level, now designated as "14f13." Goldhagen regards this kind of protest on a large scale as a model for what a suitable and successful protest movement of the Germans against holocaust might have been like.

Sauerbruch was head of the medical section of the *Reichsforschungsrat* (Reich Research Council). In this position, he approved "an increasing number of research projects from 1941/42 onwards [...] which aimed at performing experiments on humans in concentration camps or asylums."³⁷ Still, there is no definitive evidence to be found that with what was referred to as his "unbureaucratic" style, Sauerbruch should have realized that in many of these experiments the death of the subjects was deliberately accepted.³⁷

Furthermore, Sauerbruch was a regular member of the scientific senate of the Academy of Military Physicians. This senate was responsible for approving all experiments performed by the *German Wehrmacht*. Several witnesses documented his participation in the 3rd working conference of the

counseling physicians of the Academy of Military Physicians in 1943, at which Professor Karl Gebhardt (1897–1948, director of the so-called sanatorium Hohenlychen, Himmler's personal physician, convicted of war crimes in the Nuremberg trials of physicians, and hanged) and Dr. Fritz Fischer (1912–1948, resident in Hohenlychen, convicted of war crimes in the Nuremberg trials of physicians, and sentenced to lifelong prison) reported on experiments investigating the effects of sulfonamide on prisoners of the concentration camp Ravensbrück.^{38,39} Sauerbruch contributed to the subsequent discussion, but, much to the astonishment of his former Jewish attending, Rudolf Nissen (1896–1981), he did not criticize the experiments. However, Nissen believes that it was not possible to publicly voice criticism in this context.³⁸ This is supported by another report stating that the majority of physicians present at this session considered the experiments superfluous without expressing their criticism (declaration of June 18, 1947 by Ludwig Lendle given to the Verlag Lambert Schneider, from the manuscript department of the *Deutsches Literaturarchiv* [German Literature Archives], access No. 2000.7). During the Nuremberg trials of physicians, Karl Gebhardt and Fritz Fischer declared that "it was absolutely clear that the experiments had been performed on the prisoners of a concentration camp" and that none of those present at the session expressed their criticism.³⁹ Chief Prosecutor James McHaney commented: "This affidavit proves beyond doubt that knowledge of these criminal experiments was available to leading physicians in Germany [. . .] They were individuals who were in a position to take measures to prevent such things and had the duty to do so."³⁹ In the Journal of the University of Göttingen, Wolfgang Heubner, together with Sauerbruch, protested against this representation of the situation in the 1947 published book *Das Diktat der Menschenverachtung* (The Dictate of the Contempt of Humanity)³⁹ by Alexander Mitscherlich and Fred Mielke, making it clear that "there are no grounds whatsoever for blaming us for encouraging violations of humanity through inadmissible silence."⁴⁰ In an affidavit, Sauerbruch declared, moreover, that during the 3rd working session of the counseling physicians of the Academy of Military Physicians "none of the participants was likely to have heard that experiments were performed on prisoners" (declaration of July 14, 1947 by Sauerbruch given to the Verlag Lambert Schneider, from the manuscript department of the *Deutsches Literaturarchiv* [German Literature Archives], access No. 2000.7). Alexander Mitscherlich responded to this criticism and clarified the intention of his book, *The Dictate of the Contempt of Humanity*, which was not to accuse or to ostracize anybody but rather "to point out the dangers to which scientists were exposed by no longer being able to control the forces they unleashed. It is a problem that concerns not only us Germans. This is why the book has everywhere been correctly interpreted as intended, that is as a forewarning of an all-pervasive danger rather than as a means of encouraging a cheap hatred of Germans."⁴¹ This all-pervasive danger is also present nowadays, and parallels to the situation in Nazi Germany were recently drawn impressively by Elie Wiesel, former prisoner of the concentration camp Buchenwald

and recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1986, in a perspective article.⁴²

In his much acclaimed article on the role of German physicians under National Socialism, Hartmut Hanauske-Abel regards the behavior sported at the meeting of military physicians as typical of the time since “no-one had the courage to sacrifice himself and to oppose the government publicly.”⁴³ In another study, Hanauske-Abel demonstrates that German medicine did not gradually slide down a slippery slope into “Nazi medicine” but that the relationship between the medical community and the government was dramatically changed by the convergence of political, scientific and economic forces in 1933.⁴⁴ However, it remains open whether public criticism or even opposition would have been effective or whether Sauerbruch would then have risked losing any possibility of exerting his influence. On the other hand, Sauerbruch would not have endangered his position as a university teacher by not publicly supporting the Nazi regime as is illustrated by others who did not show this kind of public support. From today’s perspective, the prominence and importance of Sauerbruch as a public person raise expectations of more progressive and critical behavior. Nevertheless, it is very hard to tell how difficult it actually is to express public criticism in a totalitarian state. On the other hand, there was also active resistance to the Nazi regime at the Charité, for instance by the physician Georg Groscurth (Fig. 2).

After 1945

Sauerbruch was one of only a few chairmen of the Charité who experienced the collapse and the occupation of



FIGURE 2. Georg Groscurth (1904–1944). Georg Groscurth, physician at the Charité and Moabit Hospital, was active in a resistance group called *Europäische Union* (European Union), together with Robert Havemann, Herbert Richter-Luckian, and Paul Rentsch. These 4 members of the resistance group were sentenced to death by the National Socialist *Volksgerichtshof* (People’s Court) under its president Roland Freisler on Dec 16, 1943. Georg Groscurth was executed in the Brandenburg-Görden prison on May 8, 1944. Courtesy of Charité, Department of Medical History, picture archives.

Berlin in the Charité in 1945. During the final stages of World War II, Sauerbruch had moved to the Charité and lived there to continually operate on wounded soldiers in a surgical bunker.⁵ Sauerbruch became Medical Officer of Berlin’s first postwar municipal council, effective from May 17, 1945.⁴⁵ In this position, he organized epidemic control, but he also hesitated to agree to the removal of all fascist elements from the health services. On October 12, 1945, the 4 Allies on the basis of Sauerbruch’s political actions and attitudes between 1933 and 1945 decided to remove him from office at the municipal council.⁴⁵ A detailed analysis of Sauerbruch’s political stance after 1945 was conducted by the former chairman of Medical History at Berlin’s Charité, Professor Dietrich Tutzke, and published in 1985.⁴⁵ Sauerbruch was clearly a figurehead of East German science,⁴⁶ and his ambiguous relationship with the Nazis was neglected both in the German Democratic Republic (East Germany)³ and the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany)⁴⁷ until the 1980s.^{4,45}

Sauerbruch’s activities during the period of National Socialism were reviewed by the Allies because of his acceptance of the appointment to state councilor and surgeon general by the Nazis and an annual income of 200,000 to 300,000 Reichsmark.⁴⁸ In 1949, however, the denazification trial ended with a verdict of not guilty (see Appendix 4 for a broadcast of extracts of the trial).^{4,49} However, his assistance in approving research projects in concentration camps was not known at that time. In early summer 1948 at the latest, an unfortunate period started with sclerotic dementia that reduced his surgical reliability and mental energy, which forced Sauerbruch to resign from his position as the chair of surgery at the Charité in Berlin on Dec 3, 1949.⁴⁶ Moreover, at that time Sauerbruch sometimes behaved strangely during operations, and his actions during that period might be viewed as controversial but are most likely attributable to his dementia.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, we personally feel with former colleagues of Sauerbruch who stated after his death that “The last period of Sauerbruch’s life that was characterized by his ailment does not correspond to the picture that deserves to be preserved.”⁵⁰ In contrast to his role in the period of National Socialism, there is no evidence that he openly supported any of the 4 Allies. His so-called “memoirs”¹ were published soon after his death; however, from a historical perspective, these recordings are only of limited value^{9,51} since they were written by a third person. Sauerbruch died in Berlin on July 2, 1951.

CONCLUSION

Sauerbruch was by no means an overt opponent of the Nazi regime or even a member of resistance.⁵ As shown, Sauerbruch’s public political statements were clearly in favor of the National Socialist state. This open support was important for the international reputation of Nazi Germany but also strengthened National Socialists’ power within Germany. Nevertheless, Sauerbruch was very selective in his statements: Depending on the addressee, he did indeed express his criticism of National Socialism⁴ or personally speak up for victims of Nazi persecution.²²

Sauerbruch's attitude to Nazi ideology is clearly suspicious,² and he seems to have been a pivotal supporter of their policy, in particular in his public pronouncements. His support of National Socialism from 1933 to 1945 should not be forgotten when judging his clearly outstanding achievements as a surgeon. It is very important to judge historical personalities within the historical context in which they lived and worked.⁵² Thus, Ernst Sauerbruch was neither one of the most ardent Nazis⁵³ nor a clear opponent.³² His ambiguous stance is probably more typical of the role physicians played during National Socialism than the well-known black-and-white cases.

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Appendix 1¹⁸

Sauerbruch EF. Broadcast speech on the plebiscite of Nov. 12, 1933 [Broadcast, Ffm 2590251, Oct 28th, 1933]. Frankfurt am Main: Deutsches Rundfunkarchiv, 1933.

The German government offers all German citizens the opportunity to freely declare their political will and convictions on November 12. Nine months full of fighting and enthusiasm, full of dedication and unceasing endeavors, but also full of resistance and doubt, have inflamed Germany and roused the country from 15 years of agony. There is no German today who does not need to ask himself seriously and full of responsibility, “Where do I stand vis-à-vis the state, what has the state done for us, and what must I do for the state?” Since the World War and its unique testimony to the unity of our people, these questions with their demands come to mind once again for the first time since then. And just like then, not for political reasons, but from the direct inner necessity of a national experience of one’s own.

The shattering of our fatherland after years of valiant fighting, the shame brought on by a humiliating peace, disunity, and party squabbling had suppressed the revival and dignity of a responsible national conscience for 15 years. Disagreeing on the value and importance of our national character, deprived of our rights and emasculated, but also without the will to free ourselves. And when the German national anthem was heard, the ardent yearning that our people may once again stand together fraternally to defiantly protect our beloved fatherland was mingled with bitterness over our lost freedom. All of us who suffered under this burden, hoped and worked for a time when our people would regain an awareness of who we are and for the grand idea of a national uprising. My dear listeners, it is important to bear in mind these 15 years of degradation and disunity at this very time. This is the only way we can see clearly where we stand regarding our leadership and that puts us into a position to correctly evaluate its achievement and significance over the last 9 months. By remembering the degrading period of German history from 1918 to 1933, even those who have so far been standing apart with doubts and criticism despite their willingness to make sacrifices for their fatherland, will wholeheartedly support the government at this time.

And indeed, with the redeeming statement that led to our withdrawal from the disarmament conference on October

14, inhibitions and resistance were finally overcome. The moment determining our fate so ardently awaited had finally come, the moment at which we no longer accepted any agreement at any price from abroad, but knew how to preserve the honor of our people with self-assurance. Grateful and proud, we were once again able to be what we had been denied for such a long time: Men who embrace all that is great and strong but also strongly reject all that is unworthy. And all of a sudden, even those who had so far been reluctant recognized the right of the government to follow with iron determination their course of reuniting all national energies and understood the true motive behind our revolution, which was not to fight and to seize power but to renew the German character.

A hard and grave future lies ahead of us. In the times to come, our social duties will claim enormous sacrifices and make inexorable demands on each of us. Nevertheless, our national uprising will be crowned by success in the end if all of us show goodwill, if the enervating fights within our people stop, and if we all unite our forces. A vote is definitely not needed this time to confirm the German government and the course it is following but an overwhelming declaration by the people to support the will of the Führer and the great task lying ahead of him will show the world that Germany has awoken and is reclaiming its right to free self-determination and to thus ensure true peace, work, and reconstruction. That is what the plebiscite is about, that is what the parliamentary election of November 12 is about.

Appendix 2¹⁹

Sauerbruch EF. “Demonstration of the German scientific community” in Leipzig on the occasion of the plebiscite of Nov 12, 1933 [Speech, Ffm 2632038/2, Nov 12th, 1933].

Frankfurt am Main: Deutsches Rundfunkarchiv, 1933.

Comrades, colleagues, fellow Germans,

I am standing here in front of you feeling a little apprehensive because I am speaking extemporaneously. I let myself be carried away by this day and this solemn hour I was allowed to share with you. The solemnity of an hour which is only a small part of the great events and experiences that will take hold of us and carry us and will tomorrow lead us unerringly into the future. All of you know that a vote won’t actually be necessary tomorrow since only few would doubt that this time the government’s intentions are supported by the whole German people with iron resolution. But on the other hand, it is a fact that we more than ever need this vote for the benefit of the foreign countries, which still do not believe and do not want to believe, that is, do not want to believe for fear.

And what the foreign countries fear is not so much war but rather something that has seized the German people with an elementary, supernatural power, rousing and stirring up the people and thereby reviving and restoring its lost and buried values. But, my dear comrades who are gathered here, as a

physician who is in touch with the people and also with the foreign people I know that something more is beginning to bud here some understanding for us, and what our colleague Binder just said is definitely right, namely that a growing number of people abroad understand us and, above all, sympathize with what is necessary for us and with our will to live.

All of us who have just listened with quivering hearts to the pure confession I am almost tempted to say the innocently pure confession of our dear colleague Hirsch from Göttingen—all of us should wish that this would have been heard, experienced, felt and understood abroad.

Appendix 3²¹

Sauerbruch EF. Bestowal of the National Prize for Arts and Sciences [Speech, Ffm 2632038/2 and Ffm 2864095]. Frankfurt am Main: Deutsches Rundfunkarchiv, 1938.

The bestowal of the national prize by our Führer made me think about what has been the most crucial phase for my own development. The first 8 years of my academic career in Zurich, only interrupted by my wartime military service, established a firm basis for the further expansion of my tasks as a physician and surgeon. Living and working among the Swiss people, which has developed a national character and unity in the course of its history as well as a form of social life that regulates the relations of its citizens in a most agreeable manner, made a strong impression on me. I am very grateful for the time spent there and remember with pleasure my friends there, the government, and the university. However, despite my ties with the country, it was of course only natural for me to accept the call to the University of Munich in the fateful year 1918. This was the beginning of hard times. Still, I thank my destiny that I was allowed to experience at first hand the decline of our people, its inner and outer afflictions, its difficulties and tensions, hopes and disappointments. These were difficult times with special demands on an academic teacher. He had to do more than just convey medical knowledge to his students. More important was his comradely readiness to sympathize with his young friends, to understand them and work with them. Above all, this meant restoring their belief in the German fatherland and often even dispelling their despair. This duty made an incomparable strength grow within the teacher that he could in turn use for his own work and the struggle for German rebirth.

When I stated in the preface to the first volume of my *Thoracic Surgery* in 1919 that “I wrote this book during the most difficult times of the German fatherland but firmly believing in its rebirth,” I was expressing our innermost convictions. Then came the stormy weeks in Red Munich and its liberation with the restoration of order. But it was also at that time that the first elemental national forces began to grow from the confusion, still uncontrolled and disordered but full of strength and faith.

Then came November 9, 1923, the day on which the first national trial of strength failed and disappointment and despair buried our hopes. During this great and fateful time, determined creative work and achievement were the themes of our life. This was the time when the foundation was laid for the achievements that today received the highest praise from the Führer. The universities at that time were given the noble task of preserving what had been achieved till then and securing their reputation both at home and abroad. This was another task of fundamental importance for our life’s work.

When I was called from Munich to Berlin in 1927, this meant both an uninterrupted continuation but also an increase in our efforts and duties. Then came the year 1933, which brought the crucial turn for our fatherland through the Führer. National Socialism changed the life of our people on all levels, which also had vitalizing effects on medicine. The medical community had to preserve what had already proved its value, while at the same time being open to great new developments arising from the new spirit.

And now we are experiencing with pride and inner joy the recognition of the German physicians by the Führer in an elevating, wonderful manner, since the honor conferred on 2 German surgeons is, in its deeper meaning, an honor and gratification for all German physicians. Expressing our thanks for this trust, we also wish to commit ourselves to effectively contributing to the great tasks lying ahead of our people.

Appendix 4⁴⁹

Sauerbruch EF and the judge of the denazification jury (name unknown). “Extract from the denazification trial of Ferdinand Sauerbruch” in Berlin on April 22, 1949, which was broadcast by RIAS [Ffm 2633021, April 22, 1949].

Frankfurt am Main: Deutsches Rundfunkarchiv, 1949.

Broadcast comment: “The trial of Professor Sauerbruch was just as moving.”

Sauerbruch: “Now just imagine – 4 years [Sauerbruch is probably referring to the 4 years from the end of the war to the conclusion of the denazification trial] – day after day, year after year.”

Judge: “These 4 years are not our fault.”

Sauerbruch: “What are they?”

Judge: “Not our fault.”

Sauerbruch: “Yes, our fault, our fault then, but I am almost tempted to say, it is a violation of a man who has always done his duty. And after all that’s the way it is. All I can say is, I’m astonished.”

Judge: “Herr Geheimrat, we can’t argue now about whether it is justified that we are sitting in judgment on you.”

Sauerbruch: “And if we don’t agree, alright then let’s leave it at that.”

Laughter of those present.